

WASHINGTON, D. C., SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 1, 1896.

SAVED FROM THE FURY AND FLAMES OF PERRINE'S COMET.

MATHEMATICAL DEMONSTRATION OF WASHINGTON'S NARROW ESCAPE FROM UNIVERSAL FLOOD OR AN ATMOSPHERIC OCEAN OF FIRE.

TERROR AND DISMAY OF ITS INHABITANTS ON THE MEMORABLE NIGHT OF MARCH 14th. WHY THE CELESTIAL VISITOR TOOK THE BACK TRACK.

On the night of the 14th of March, 1896, there were two persons in the heliotrope-scented boudoir of Mrs. Haggard Ryder, the other being Mr. Haggard Ryder. The lady was seated at a table. The man was in bed. The lady was busily engaged with a pencil making calculations on some sheets of paper, of which there were many, well filled with words and figures, but more especially figures. In the background of the table was a large globe and the family cat. There was also on the table a pearl-handled sixty-four power refracting opera glass. With this the lady made frequent trips to the south window of the boudoir, which opened up directly on space. Every time the lady went to the window the cat went with her, and when she came back the cat came back, and also Mr. Haggard Ryder sneezed. The three lived on Connecticut avenue.

For Mr. Haggard Ryder was asleep. He had gone to sleep just as the ornolu clock struck 12 midnight, Naval Observatory time. He had been reading the new book entitled "Perrine's Comet; or The Hit of the Century." Mr. Haggard Ryder was a deep thinker and drinker. He was also a skeptic. He didn't believe in heaven, or taxes, and, lately, he had begun to have very little faith in his wife—that is to say, in her sanity. He didn't like what he called her "idiotic monkeying with mathematics." And so it was, that when Mrs. Haggard Ryder went over to the bedside and awoke him ever so gently, he protested with both hands and feet, and said in a loud voice that he wished Mrs. H.R. and the comet were both in the same place whether he believed that place existed or not.

"Well," growled the aroused skeptic, "where is it now?"

"According to the ephemerides, my dear, it's in Taurus."

"Who are the ephemerides, pray, and who is Taurus, anyhow? Last night I understood you to say that Aries said that it was heading for Honolulu!"

"Mr. Ryder, this tone is not becoming a man who has an immortal soul—"

"That hasn't slept a peaceful wink ever since you bought that 'Six Weeks in Astronomy.' I have told you six hundred times every day for this six weeks course that I'm not afraid of a comet. Nobody knows what a comet is, and when we find out there won't be any monopoly of the scientific data or subsequent knowledge. We'll all find out in a lump."

"But, Ryder, wouldn't it be well to be prepared; and, anyhow, haven't you proved to yourself that if it makes a hit the Chinese will be the first to go?"

"But, Mr. Ryder, suppose it should come through?"

"There you go again; now, how in the name of all the long-tailed tramp-stars in the blood-red skies, could a comet plug a hole in a solid body like the earth that is four hundred million miles in diameter, according to what you said last week?"

"I didn't say that, because the earth is only about eight thousand miles thick. You must be thinking of the population of China."

"Don't you forget it, I am, Mrs. Haggard Ryder; I am perfectly satisfied that if there is to be any collision the Japs and the Chinese will be side tracked first. I am willing to stand the chances of that thing coming through eight thousand miles of water, mud, stones, houses and felines. How far off is it; can you see it yet?"

"My calculations agree with the figures as published in the third night edition of the Evening Times. At 11 p. m. it was four hundred thousand miles off, and was traveling at the rate of twenty-three miles per second."

"Then she oughtn't to be due before next Wednesday week. Why, Mrs. Haggard Ryder, if the thing was that close, you ought to be able to see it distinctly with the naked eye."

"Not at all; the fact is that it is not above the horizon at night and never has been since it passed its perihelion."

"It's what? Well, suppose it has passed its perihelion, doesn't that show that it can give a thing the go by without hitting it, Mrs. Wisecracks? I suppose you will next say that there is a chance of its hitting the horizon. O, Caroline, go to bed."

An hour after this complete suppression of the amateur wife astronomer the male Haggard Ryder was awakened again. He made another opening remark for which there was also no warrant in Scripture.

"Mr. Ryder, did I ever tell you about Dick's theory?"

"No; I'm glad to say you forgot it; but who was Dick and what was his theory? Do let down that sash."

"Well, he was one of the greatest of astronomers. He believed that a comet was hell."

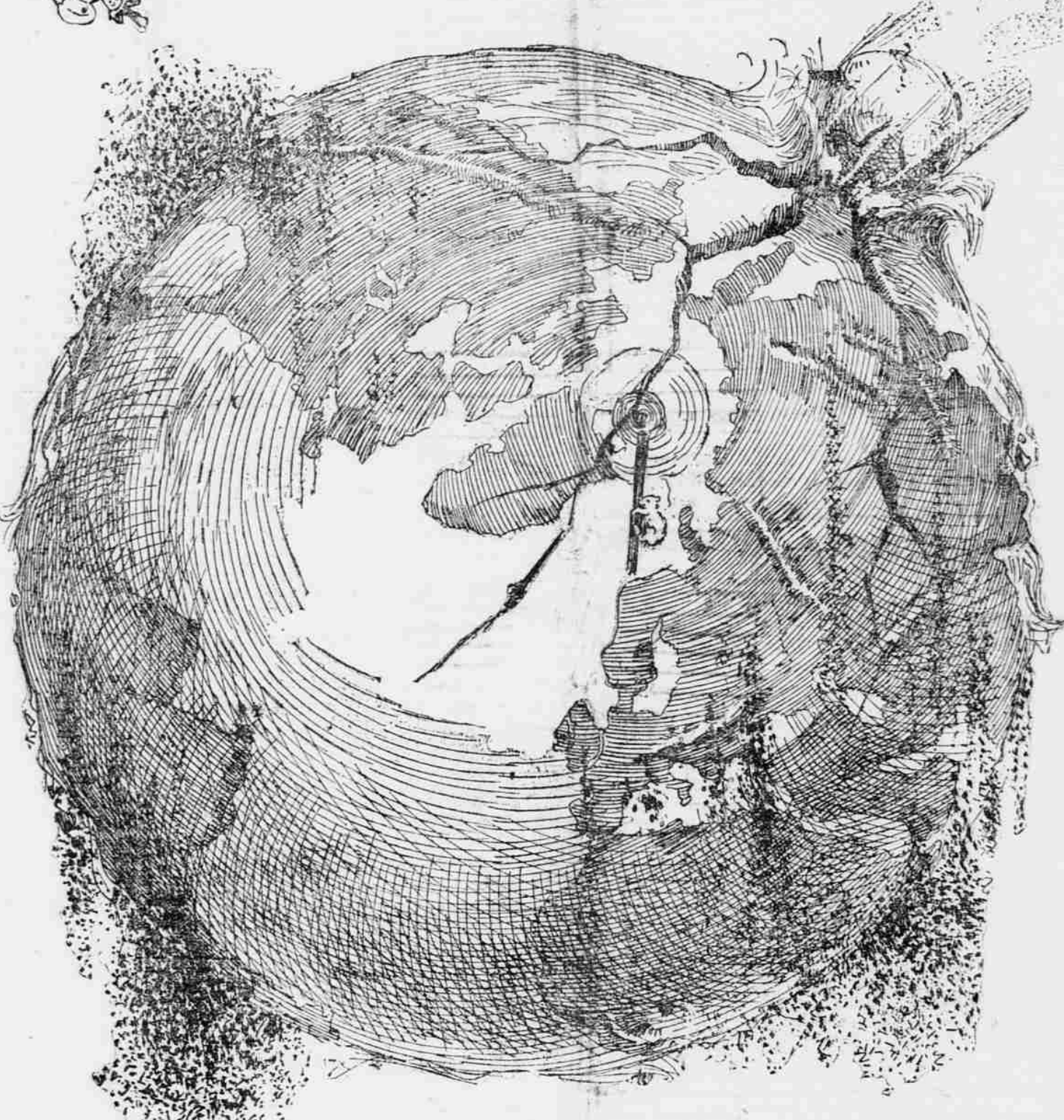
"So do I; don't see how he could believe anything else if he had it in the house for six weeks."

"Don't be flippant, Mr. Ryder. The great Dick believed that the souls of the departed who were not good enough to obtain a heavenly reward were confined on a comet, and that they were alternately frozen by being carried off trillions of miles into space and then brought back again toward the sun and warmed."

"You mean burned or roasted."

"Exactly."

"Well, that's interesting. In the first place it proves that a comet isn't solid, or at least until it freezes at the other end of the trip. In the second place, if a comet, with an excursion party of the kind you mention should really hit the earth, we would be left with some very bad people on our hands. There is a satisfaction, of course, in seeing one's departed relatives now and then, but a good deal would depend on the shape in which they arrive at the station. It would be very embarrassing, for instance, to get a job lot of our ancestors back again with no chance of their ever leaving us if, as you say, the comet would keep right on after us and with us 'till the end of the route was reached. I would much prefer to have mine on ice, but if they come, I suppose we'll have to put up with them or they'll put up with us, which is somewhat worse. If we can live under this government I can. I can't help thinking what our boarders on the Perrine plan will think of the poetry and remarks made about them on the tombstones by their surviving historians. But, to be serious, I rather like Dick's theory."



of the great plague. Every where, however, there was an open or concealed conviction that something was going to happen, and there was no paper read with such avidity as the Evening Times, which published bulletins every hour or so from the Lick Observatory, and the great Yerkes reflector, which had recently been put up in the Chicago University. Some of the most valuable of the bulletins were, however, received from the Georgetown Observatory and from the Naval Observatory.

Mrs. Haggard Ryder wrote a very discouraging letter to the Evening Times which was published on the evening of the 13th of March, accompanied by her graphic sketch of the effect of the comet hitting the earth in any particular place. Her theory was, of course, that the comet was solid. The sketch is reproduced on this page, and shows that the impact of the comet by the law of propulsion and reflex action started several of the nations of the globe into the air.

For instance, a blow which would fall on China would convert the whole population of Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia, into a sky-excursion party, prematurely. Mrs. Ryder was afraid that the blow would fall on Korea, in which case the direct results of the shock would be felt in the northwest of Washington, where it is supposed people are least prepared for an interview with the empyrean court of appeals.

What did happen can, however, be best noted by a study of the people who got off the earth when the crisis arrived, according to Mrs. Ryder's plans and specifications. It will be noted that most of the people of Ivy City, Anacostia and Alexandria assumed positions which would insure their falling on their feet when they came back.

Just at this time, when Mrs. Haggard Ryder was perspiring profusely, the crash of the comet arrived. One hundred and nineteen thousand people were in cellars and improvised catacombs into which the cooking utensils and cradles were stored for a long siege. The other inhabitants were abroad on the streets with umbrellas, or were out at their front gates with their boats, or were loaded up to the nostrils, so to speak, with sponges saturated with sulphuric acid, alcohol, or strictly union beer. There hadn't been any religious gatherings since last Sunday, as most of the congregations, priests and pastors had got off the earth and gone into it.

It was understood that the comet had gone 'round the sun on the off side and was coming up on the other side. It was so close to the sun that it was invisible, day and night, but the calculations were that, after passing its perihelion, it would make straight for the point where the earth was to be at twenty-one minutes after four o'clock a. m. March 14. It was for this reason that no one could tell whether it would hit in the dead hour of the night, for no one believed the astronomers as to the exact hour or hours.

Special Announcement.
WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 18, 1896.—On and after this date The Morning and Evening Times will no longer be delivered to subscribers underground. Their attention is called to the following dispatch from the Lick Observatory:

"Prof. Perrine has just discovered the Lost Comet. By an error in the calculations of 2 minutes and 5-10ths of a second of an arc, the comet went wrong. Prof. Dick's theory has, however, been fully verified. Perrine's comet was loaded from the head to the tail with spiritual people, most of whom were young men and young women who had gone wrong in St. Louis and Chicago. Their temperature was 4486 in the shade. The last observation made from this observatory showed them to have been otherwise badly scorched. When the comet got near Jackson City its inhabitants directed the engineer to steer them away from that dangerous locality and the earth thus escaped."

There is some variety in it and it gives people a run for their money. The idea of a stationary hell is something terrific. Hell on the excursion plan is unique, if not orthodox. I don't see exactly the use, however, of heading that kind of a comet this way. I'm opposed to any unnecessary importations. The woods are full already of people that ought to have been comitized several years ago."

About the time that these theories were being discussed there was all over Washington a holy horror of the danger of a collision with the comet. People talked about it and dreamed about it. The philosophical people and the scientific people recalled the fact that in 1861 a comet did pass the earth at close quarters, and even went through the atmosphere, but it wasn't noticed on account of the war. It must have happened in the daytime, because there weren't any fireworks to speak of, and some people still believe that it was a case of "never touched me."

But the people of this city last March were disposed to take matters in earnest. The varieties of opinion were expressed by the variety of the devices to provide against the coming catastrophe. People who believed in the liquid theory had boats in their backyards and folks who believed in the solidarity of the visitor had excavated tombs, catacombs, and cellars, as they do in the West for protection against cyclones.

People who believed in the gas theory provided themselves with sponges saturated with the antidote liquids and gases, and people who believed that the solids would be dissipated in dust in the air put in a supply of umbrellas and dusters.

Some of the godly believed in prayers alone, and some of the more godly believed in plenty of prayer, if sent up from the cellar, while the Haggard Ryderites were disposed to scoff at the mathematicians and their talk about nodes, ellipses, foci, ephemerides, and the attraction of Jupiter.

Some people believed that if the comet reached the earth's atmosphere and held a gas that would set the air on fire the scripture would be verified, which stated that the "heavens would be shrivelled up like a scroll." These people could not suggest any preventive, and as a proof of their indifference to the possibilities, they attended a French ball in a body one night in February.

They were as reckless as some of the folks in Florence during the time